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## Treatment program gives hope to women in prison

BY KRISTEN SMITH • STAFF WRITER • JANUARY 8, 2009

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CLAYMONT -- Lynn Bates doesn't hesitate when asked what she misses most about life outside prison walls.

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"I miss my freedom, my job waitressing and being out in society," she said. "This is a mini society, but I wanna face the world without fear ... to go out there and know I'm worth something."

Bates, originally of Lewes, is one of 65 women currently housed at the Baylor Women's Correctional Institution, the only women's prison in the state. She resides in The Village, a separate facility that offers therapy to those suffering from substance abuse. The program, which started in 1994, is one of the few prison-based treatment programs in the nation designed specifically for female offenders.

And soon, program director Gwen Empson will visit Sussex County to speak about The Village and the women who benefit from it. The presentation, "Women in the Delaware Prison System," is slated to be held at Epworth Methodist Church on Holland Glade Road and is open to ex-offenders and those who are interested in learning more about the program.

While Delaware has the highest rate of incarceration of women per population in the United States, Empson said she's doing her part to lower the statistics. As participation in the program increases, she is confident the number of female offenders will decline.

"The success a woman has in our facility depends entirely on how she comes in," Empson said. "Some might be pregnant (and) getting through the pregnancy is first priority. Others think they just need to stop their drug use, when really they need to change the way they think about that behavior. All of them need to realize they need to be here."

### A Chance To Talk

A panel consisting of experts who work with women at BWCI and ex-offenders will soon gather to discuss issues and programs related to the female prison population.

In addition to Empson, presenters include representatives from various civic organizations and ministries throughout the county.

When BWCI opened in 1991, the facility was capable of housing 200 female inmates. Currently, more than 400 inmates, consisting of both pre-trial and sentenced adult females at all security levels, call BWCI their temporary home. The age levels of the women range from 18 to over 60, with two-thirds of the women between 18 and 45 years old.

Since BWCI is the only female correctional institution in the state, its location in New Castle County

## Delaware Coast Press



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Lynn Bates, 32, of Lewes, is an inmate at Baylor Women's Correctional Institution in New Castle. She is in the Key Village program, a prison-based therapeutic community for women inmates with a history of drug and alcohol abuse. (John King photo)

### IF YOU GO

WHAT. Forum on "Women in the Delaware Prison System"

WHERE. Epworth Methodist Church, Holland Glade Road, Rehoboth Beach

WHEN. 10 a.m. to noon Thursday, Jan. 15

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presents unique problems to women like Bates and their families in Sussex County.

But the distance from relatives and home isn't the only challenge.

For Bates, and many other offenders, the stage of denial is long and hard.

Having been at BWCI's Village for 16 months now, she admits every day is still a constant struggle.

"We stick together in here, but we also hold each other accountable," Bates said. "Sometimes it's really hard, but this program isn't designed for me to like it. It's designed for me to not wanna come back."

The pod room she and a roommate share is not much larger than a walk-in closet, barely fitting a narrow set of bunk beds, a single desk, a chair and a wardrobe closet.

Arrested 17 months ago for illegal drug use involving cocaine, Bates was remanded to house arrest and forced to wear an ankle bracelet.

"I cut off the bracelet and went on the run for seven days," she said. "I wanted to be rebellious."

But following the violation of that probation, she found herself sentenced to four years and nine months at BWCI. Her stint at The Village lessens that sentence, barring completion of rehabilitation.

## Time To Progress

As one of the prison's many educational services, Bates is currently working to obtain her high school diploma.

"This program has made me realize it's OK to go through (difficult) things, but you gotta want the recovery," she said. "Before I came here, I tried to keep this mask on ... to make myself look the good person I really wasn't. Now, I'm 32-year-old and I gotta start my life from rock bottom."

For Bates, who has four children she hasn't seen since her incarceration, that includes regaining her parental rights.

And nobody understands the want for family better than Christina Harvey of Milton, who since 1996 has spent nine years off and on in BWCI.

"This is like my second home," she said, jokingly.

"My family just recently came back into my life because they can finally see the change in me," the 40-year-old said. "They were pretty mad at me for a while."

Harvey began her rap with petty charges that later escalated to robbery.

"The more I wanted to get high, the bigger the charge," she said of her alcohol and drug addiction.

Tearing up, Harvey said being locked up leaves her with many regrets.

"There are so many years of my kids' lives I'll never get back," she said, sobbing. "I should have been there for them and I wasn't."

Carla Cain, senior counselor at BWCI, said she has seen the program's impact on Harvey and others. Because of that, she's glad the facility can make presentations, like the one scheduled to take place next week in Rehoboth Beach.

"This time (Harvey's) determined to get something different out of our program," she said. "She was so hard core before that we couldn't get her to be emotional about anything. Now, she wants to change her life. And she will."

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